


GAZING AT GAWAIN:  
RECONSIDERING TOURNAMENTS, COURTLY  
LOVE, AND THE LADY WHO LOOKS  
ELIZABETH L'ESTRANGE

n an ivory mirror case dating from the first half of the fourteenth century, two tiers of female spectators watch two pairs of knights jousting in front of a castle.<sup>1</sup> The scene is full of action: heralds sound their trumpets, one knight has succeeded in removing another's helmet with his lance, and the ladies' gazes and gestures indicate that they are closely following the battle below (Fig. 1). These women watch the men performing their feats of chivalric prowess as they do in countless other representations of tournaments and jousts, not only on ivories, but also in other media including illuminated manuscripts.

Historians have long acknowledged the importance of the female spectator in actual, staged, tournaments and literary critics have noted her intrinsic role in the tournaments of romance texts.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, she functions as an inspiration to the male knight performing on the field and as a means of constructing his masculinity.<sup>3</sup> However, art historians have generally overlooked the potential agency of this female spectator, who was able to look down on male bodies from a privileged viewing position.<sup>4</sup> This may be because of the relative lack of evidence relating to women's participation in tournaments and because of the way many feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to courtly love "have tended to write women out of the amorous scenarios [...], often making the lady vanish."<sup>5</sup>

This article uses the tournament context, in which women look at men (and vice versa), as a way of moving beyond the binary oppositions, such as masculine/feminine and active/passive, that have traditionally structured discussions of gender and the gaze. By looking in particular at the imagery on carved ivory objects made for women and their relationship to contemporary literature, I will argue for a more nuanced consideration of the ways women were able to look in the Middle Ages.

Until relatively recently, considerations of “the gaze” and of women as viewers have, broadly speaking, been heavily influenced by psychoanalytic and feminist film theory, notably Laura Mulvey’s important essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” where the gaze is *a priori* considered to be the property of men and women are denied the ability to look.<sup>6</sup> Any manifestation of a “feminine” gaze is considered to be dangerous to masculine integrity and must be reflected back in order to maintain that integrity. When it first appeared in the 1970s, Mulvey’s approach seemed to provide an analogy to the relatively disadvantaged position of women as subjects, spectators, creators and commissioners of art throughout history.

Medieval and Early Modern scholars have found support for the kind of binary concepts proposed by Mulvey in the images and literature of these periods. On the one hand, the lover is at the mercy of his beloved lady; her gaze is often fetishized, being described in courtly literature as like an arrow or a dart, which pierces the lover, wounding or trapping him.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, conduct manuals written for women reveal the way the female gaze—and therefore female sexuality as well – were dangerous and needed to be controlled. As Kim Philips notes, medieval concerns about the gaze are “strongly motivated by anxiety about feminine sexual purity. [...] Through lack of [...] firm demeanor [...] a young woman in male company opens herself up, imparts an impression of availability.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, in conduct books like the fourteenth-century *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, the author advised his daughters to keep their gaze steady and averted.<sup>9</sup> This advice appears to have been given visual expression in representations, such as the fifteenth-century profile portraits of secular women discussed by Patricia Simons that seem to deny the woman the ability to “look back” at the (male) viewer, or the illuminations in the *Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux*, which Madeleine H. Caviness argued encouraged Jeanne to behave correctly and to control her sexuality.<sup>10</sup>

As Caviness points out in her later study, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages*, the influence of the Mulveian Gaze was

so great that “by the late 1980s it seemed that ‘the gaze’ could be invoked everywhere as men looking at women to objectify them, in life as well as in representations, thus obfuscating different viewing positions.”<sup>11</sup> Whereas it is necessary to acknowledge the way patriarchal society has controlled and codified the gaze in favor of men, by “obfuscating different viewing positions” we risk ignoring alternatives to the (merely) dominant, rather than universal, male/phallic gaze, as well as instances of potential agency either for the woman who looks or for those looking from a “feminine” position. As Caviness remarks, “[a]s soon as we refuse to treat ‘the male gaze’ as natural and essential, this particular model demonstrates the long duration of hegemonies of gender based on looking and being seen instead of demonstrating a universal truth.”<sup>12</sup> A pertinent parallel can be drawn here with E. Jane Burn’s contention that there is more than one type of courtly love, and that alongside the conventional notion of the fetishized lady, we may find forms of resistance and desire that “fall beyond and complicate in various ways the sex-based binary terms of *male* and *female* (original emphasis).”<sup>13</sup>

Mulvey herself acknowledged that the theory she proposed was specific to the interpretation of mid twentieth-century narrative cinema. Furthermore, in the Middle Ages there was not one universally accepted theory of vision: competing theories, like those of extromission and intromission, existed concurrently and were not specifically related to gender or sex.<sup>14</sup> Such ideas are evident in a wide range of medieval texts, including theological, romance, and medical writings. As Suzannah Biernoff notes in relation to discourses of desire (in both moral theology and amatory literature), “the male gaze is by no means always phallic; and ladies’ eyes are not always chaste, reflective orbs or instruments of maternal love.”<sup>15</sup> Exploring alternatives to the pervasive “wounding gaze,” Robert Baldwin has identified a theme of mutual gazing between lovers in literary and visual sources up to the Renaissance, where the love expressed is “essentially reciprocal and non-violent.”<sup>16</sup> Platonic and courtly literature described the “eyes as mirrors reflecting the lover’s soul,” as in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan and Isolde* where, after drinking

the love potion, “they were so joined in love that each was clearer than a looking glass to the other.”<sup>17</sup> This idea of mutual gazing, of a non-threatening look of love, is one way of interpreting the chivalric themes on the carved ivory mirror cases and boxes—often given as love tokens—to be discussed below.

In the field of art history itself, scholars have explored women’s agency as viewers by focusing on contexts and objects that were specifically experienced by them. For example, in her exploration of the iconography of the Camera di San Paolo, painted by Correggio for the abbess Gioanna da Piacenza (ca. 1518), Regina Stefaniak rejected the idea of a universal, masculine, “phallic gaze” derived from film theory claiming that “an historical perspective empowers Gioanna” thus redressing the notion of feminine passivity versus masculine aggression.<sup>18</sup> In terms of secular audiences, Adrian W. B. Randolph and Geraldine A. Johnson have focused on objects like birth trays and Marian reliefs that were destined for the patrician home and for lay female viewers in particular.<sup>19</sup> Such approaches have informed my own work on the reception of maternal imagery in Books of Hours, where I have argued for an analytical strategy that does not confound the agency of female (and male) viewers.<sup>20</sup>

This overview shows some of the alternative ways of theorizing the gaze and the female spectator that literary and art historians have put forward following recognition of the limitations of applying Mulveian theory to pre-modern sources. Here I add representations of tournaments and jousts to the debate as a means of continuing the reappraisal of the female gaze. Reconsidering the tournament, which has long been analyzed in terms of the knight and chivalric behavior, is one way of complicating the binary oppositions of the Mulveian gaze since it places the woman firmly in the position of spectator.

#### THE LADY WHO LOOKS

The chivalric tournament—its staging and representation—offers fertile ground from which to explore questions of gender and visibility in the medieval and early modern period since it is predicated on a viewer-performer basis

traditionally split along gender lines.<sup>21</sup> Early tournaments were fairly violent affairs played out across open fields and thus did not lend themselves to an audience. However, from the thirteenth century onwards, they became organized events that incorporated allegory, theatre, and spectacle, much of which was inspired by romance literature.<sup>22</sup> They thus acquired—and demanded—spectators, and the “increasingly elaborate pageantry” meant that women went from having “a purely passive inspirational role to a much more active participation in attendant ritual.”<sup>23</sup> Extant evidence, although not abundant, suggests that women not only attended jousts and tournaments in specially-erected stands, but that they also led the knights onto the field, were rescued from castles, or played some role in judging the knights and delivering the prizes.<sup>24</sup> René of Anjou’s *Livre des Tournois* (ca. 1460) deals with the manner of organizing and executing tournaments and depicts noble women inspecting the knights prior to combat, attending the tournaments, and awarding prizes at the end of the day (Fig. 2).

By the fifteenth century, then, the chivalric spectacle was one of carefully organized theatre in which the presence, performance, and visibility of both men and women was extremely important. However, art historians have yet to explore the tournament as a context in which women were able to exercise an active, legitimate gaze upon a male body, without necessarily posing a threat to masculine integrity. By engaging in such an analysis here, I will argue that the courtly lady and her look are not necessarily confounded by patriarchal proscriptions, nor do they inevitably vanish in the mirror that returns the knight’s regard.

Existing work on the politics of gender and the gaze in the tournament context focuses specifically on the construction of the lover-knight and his masculinity, and particularly on moments of instability and transgression.<sup>25</sup> For example, Louise Fradenburg has studied the tournament in late medieval Scotland, claiming that it “serves crucial homosocial functions.”<sup>26</sup> Informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Fradenburg’s notion of the female spectator sees her as “other” to the knight; her gaze functions only as something through and against which his masculine

identity can be constructed and maintained. Homosociality—and homoeroticism—are also important themes in Richard E. Zeikowitz's book, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*.<sup>27</sup> Here he notes that "[i]n chivalric texts, whether chronicles, treatises, or romances, the narrator frequently describes an exemplary knight, implicitly inviting the reader/listener to imagine him."<sup>28</sup> And he asks whether "a novice knight—or even a man who simply has a passion for chivalry" might "conjure up a homoerotically charged image of a model knight whom he desires to be like?"<sup>29</sup> Drawing directly on Mulvey, Zeikowitz focuses solely on how *men* read and understood chivalric treatises and courtly literature, and how they might have looked at other knights in a potentially homoerotic way. Thus he explores the narrator's gaze on the body of the youthful Lancelot in the *Prose Lancelot*, suggesting that it could have evoked an erotically-charged image in the male reader's mind.<sup>30</sup>

Zeikowitz elucidates possibilities for male-male identification and as such his work is part of a broader interest in constructions of masculinity in the Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup> However, he leaves the question of female spectatorship entirely to one side. Chivalric treatises such as Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry* were written specifically for a male readership, but noble women also showed a great interest in, and were owners of, other sorts of chivalric literature, especially the stories of Lancelot and Tristram.<sup>32</sup> It is important, therefore, to consider how the *female* reader might have "looked at" or imagined the figure of Lancelot described in the text. For both male and female readers, "[i]n remembering knights in armor, the reader must look at the body beneath the armor."<sup>33</sup> Whereas Zeikowitz points out that for a man "the body the reader sees before his mind's eye [...] is [...] potentially autoerotic," for the female reader, this imagining-viewing of the male body beneath the amour is inscribed within heterosexual desire. Although not transgressive per se, a woman's love for a man, like her gaze, had to be properly controlled and contained.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is possible that descriptions of the chivalric body offered a way, through the reading-imagining process, for both women and men to circumvent proscriptions on the expression of love and desire.

Another literary example, a descriptive scene from a manuscript copy of the prose *Merlin*, now in Cambridge, serves to support this idea further.<sup>35</sup> Produced in the first half of the fifteenth century, this manuscript was, by the end of the century, in the possession of one Elyanor Guldeford, a member of the rising English gentry.<sup>36</sup> As Philips has already noted in his essay on the politics of gesture in books made for English women, the *Merlin* “contains many instances of desire resulting from the gaze of men upon women or women upon men” as in this episode that follows the disarming after a tournament:

[after a tournament] on that other parte wente Gawein and his felowes hem for to vn-arme in oon of the Queenes chambers that was assigned for hem to repeare; and when thei were vn-armed and waissch, thei clothed hem richely, and yef thei were well serued it nedeth not to aske, ffor ther were ladyes and maydenes hem for to serue grete foyson [abundance]. Ther was Segramor moche be-holden of oon and of other, ffor he was a feir knight and semly [impressive/comely], and so was Dodinell le sauage; these tweyne were sore preised of alle that hem be-helden.<sup>37</sup>

Here, the knights come under the gaze of the fictional women who attend to them as well as that of the female owner-reader of the manuscript whose eyes could metaphorically linger over the “image” conjured up by the words on the page.

Phillips argues that here and in two other manuscript romances known to have been owned by women the “presentation of male bodies for the gaze of fictional women and actual readers could well be caused by the (at least partly) female audience” and that the gaze “can function without censure as a window to greater interaction and intimacy between male and female characters.”<sup>38</sup> In such circumstances, therefore, the woman’s gaze is neither disruptive-transgressive, nor denied, but corresponds rather to the “mutual gazing” explored by Baldwin. Furthermore, the heterosexual desire that the woman’s gaze implies was transferable from a literary context (imagining the knight in her mind) to a visual context—viewing and desiring not only representations

of knights and tournaments but also, by extension, viewing and desiring the participants of staged chivalric spectacles and the male body that lay beneath the armor.

It is in the light of these approaches to the female viewer and chivalric literature that we can reconsider the images of tournaments and other knightly themes found on carved ivory boxes and mirror cases that were often destined for a female audience. Our understanding of the function and interpretation of these objects is enhanced by thinking of the tournament and its attendant events as a place in which women could actively and legitimately gaze on men, in a desiring, heterosexual, yet non-threatening way, thus moving us beyond the restrictive notions of the gaze born of psychoanalytic and feminist film theories.

#### IVORY CASKETS AND MIRROR CASES

The fabrication of ivory objects—especially mirror cases, combs, and caskets—reached its zenith in the first half of the fourteenth century, with Paris being one of the important production centers.<sup>39</sup> Scholars have associated these intricately carved, expensive, objects with the aristocracy, especially with aristocratic women, who may have received them as betrothal or wedding gifts.<sup>40</sup> The themes represented on extant fourteenth-century ivories include stories taken from the romance literature of the preceding century—the tales of Tristan and Isolde, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table—as well as episodes that do not have specific literary sources, such as the Siege of the Castle of Love, images of lovers riding to hunt or playing chess, Phyllis riding Aristotle, and, as noted at the start of this article, knights jousting (Figs. 1, 3-6).

Despite the general popularity of romance literature and its imagery in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the presence of courtly, amorous imagery on objects associated with lay women often had a didactic function. For example, Susan L. Smith has argued that the images on many ivory mirror cases represent “women’s looking as responsive to the gazes and actions of men, [offering] women a model of looking that encouraged them to see themselves as they were seen by men and to subordinate their own



looking to the demands of male heterosexual desire.”<sup>41</sup> She goes on to note that there are instances where “the depicted female gaze controls the ocular encounter, either ignoring or dominating its male counterpart,” as on a mirror case from the Victoria and Albert Museum where “the eyes of a woman, shown riding out to the hunt with a young man who strokes her chin as he gazes at her, are turned not towards his, as usual, but outwards, to engage the actual beholder, cast, perhaps, in the role of silent co-conspirator in the amorous game being played.” (Fig. 3)<sup>42</sup> Yet Smith argues that such images are exceptions that more often than not highlight the general subordination of the female gaze.<sup>43</sup> However, given the plurality of medieval concepts of seeing, the various depictions of looking in chivalric imagery (both literary and visual), and the privileged position women occupied at tournaments, this alternative female gaze identified by Smith merits further exploration.

The fact that these ivory objects were associated with preening oneself—mirrors to look in, combs for the hair, caskets for jewels—made them open to criticism by those who wished to denounce women’s looking, their vanity and material excesses.<sup>44</sup> Yet in using them, the female viewer was encouraged to take up a viewing position in which she saw herself not only as a desired object, but also as a desiring subject, able to enact a certain degree of agency. Starting with an example of the type of jousting scene common on mirror cases and the lids of ivory caskets, I will suggest how, in the light of the preceding discussion, we can use the imagery on these precious objects to offer a positive reassessment of the female gaze.

An ivory casket probably made in Paris between 1330 and 1350 and now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, shows, on the lid, a central jousting scene framed by two episodes representing the *topos* known as the Siege of the Castle of Love (Fig. 4).<sup>45</sup> On the far left hand side a knight rides away with a lady on a charger while behind him a knight climbs up a castle wall; from the top of the castle, the God of Love hands a sword down to another knight.<sup>46</sup> On the far right, three knights make their attack on the castle: one climbs up a ladder, another throws roses

up toward the ladies, and another fills a catapult with flowers. Above them, two tiers of women throw roses down from the castle's walls. Above the central jousting scene, on the left, three figures, two women and a man, appear engaged in a debate, and gesture down towards the action below. To the right, a crowned female figure and her companions are also watching the joust. The central composition implies that the tournament was a locus of aristocratic lovemaking that relied on, and was enjoyed by, female viewers, who form a kind of frame to the proceedings.

Another casket, formerly in the Lord Gort Collection and unfortunately now lost, also shows a central tournament scene with female spectators watching from above (Fig. 6).<sup>47</sup> On this lid, however, we find a reference to the role of women in the arming and disarming of the knights, which provides a parallel to the literary examples discussed above. The outer panels of this casket show the arming of the two knights, each by two ladies: in both instances, one of them crowns him, and the other holds his lance. A parallel can be drawn with the image of Geoffrey Luttrell being handed his helmet and shield by his wife and daughter in the *Luttrell Psalter*.<sup>48</sup> The implication is that the tournament, and the chivalric context more generally, offered women privileged access to the male body, not only through their viewing position high on the scaffolds where they might enjoy the spectacle and imagine what lay beneath the armor, but also through their actual (dis)arming of the knight and encounter with his body.

The popularity of chivalric romances, circulating amongst the aristocracy in the form of illuminated manuscripts in the fourteenth century, cannot but have influenced—or provided a parallel to—the reception of the tournament imagery on carved ivory objects. As Carns has argued, “medieval viewers of the box in the Metropolitan Museum would most likely have recognized its affinity to manuscript compilations [of chivalric literature], as many patrons of ivory objects owned books as well.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the gaze of a female owner of an ivory mirror case or casket could also linger over the images of women (dis)arming the knights and watching them perform, in the same way that they could dwell on the images conjured up by texts or represented

in manuscript illuminations. Thus these carved scenes were also sites where concepts and proscriptions concerning the female gaze, subjectivity and objectivity, could be resisted or renegotiated. This idea can be extended to the interpretation of other scenes on the Metropolitan casket, two of which I will consider here in detail: Gawain on the Bed of Marvels and the story of Aristotle and Phyllis/Alexander.<sup>50</sup>

The story of Gawain on the Bed of Marvels appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval ou la Conte du Graal*. Gawain arrives at a castle whose inhabitants, he has been told, include "orphaned damsels and two queens" waiting to be rescued.<sup>51</sup> The castle also contains a wondrous bed that no one has sat on and survived. Not put off by his companion's warnings, Gawain asserts that he will not "refrain from sitting on that bed and seeing the maidens I saw last evening leaning at the windows."<sup>52</sup> Gawain lies down on the marvelous bed but is immediately attacked by a hail of bolts and arrows and then by a lion.<sup>53</sup> After surviving his ordeal he is congratulated by the lady of the castle and her maidens whom he has inadvertently freed.

On the Metropolitan casket, Gawain's story is represented in the third and fourth compartments of the back panel (Fig. 7). In the third, Gawain lies on a bed whose marvelous nature is indicated by the small cogs or wheels at its base.<sup>54</sup> A hail of arrows—or rather swords in this case—descends from above. In the fourth, the ladies of the castle are depicted. As Carns has noted, "Gawain's ability to survive the horrors of the Bed of Marvels is his sole achievement in the [*Story of the Grail*]. Yet he is not truly victorious here because, by becoming the castle's protector, he can never leave it."<sup>55</sup> In fact, when he finds out he is trapped, Gawain falls into an angry sulk.<sup>56</sup> How, then, might a female recipient of such a casket, especially one with knowledge of Chrétien's tale, have viewed a representation of Gawain on the Bed of Marvels? In this context, the female gaze does not reflect glory on Gawain, who is effectively made prisoner in the service of the ladies whom he has freed, nor does it pierce him with love. The episode is, instead, rather comical: like Chrétien's text, the representations on the ivories seem to challenge both the notion

of perfect knightly behavior in the service of ladies and the idea of the passive woman constructing the knight's honor. On the Lord Gort casket, the ordeal and the congratulations are merged into one, again suggesting that the ladies watch Gawain in this chivalric test in the manner of a tournament. Turning to an ivory mirror case depicting the same scene, we find the women actually looking down from a gallery, as they do in the tournament scenes on other mirrors and caskets, while Gawain lies apparently helpless on the bed below (Fig. 8).<sup>57</sup> The female gaze is privileged and its male object appears subordinate.

A female viewer/reader of Gawain's adventure—or misadventure—may have interpreted the arrival of this savior knight as being to her “ocular” advantage as well as that of the fictitious women in the castle. After his feats on the Bed of Marvels, Gawain is taken away and undressed: although he is attended in this by men, in the middle of his disarming, a young woman walks into the room, followed by “other very elegant and lovely maidens” and a youth. Although the narrator and, presumably, Gawain, dwell on the beauty of the first lady, noting her golden hair, her white and crimson face, and her well-proportioned body, the women entering the room also encounter Gawain, in the middle of being undressed.<sup>58</sup> A woman listening to or reading the tale, and by extension a woman looking at the depiction of Gawain's adventure on the ivory casket, therefore enjoyed the privileged position of viewing the male body that this episode offered them, just as a female tournament viewer could enjoy looking down at competing knights.

As noted above, some ivories were carved with the story of Phyllis and Aristotle/Alexander (Fig. 5). This is one of the well-known “women on top” or “power of women” tales popular in the later Middle Ages, in which the wise philosopher Aristotle let himself be ridden like a beast by Phyllis, the mistress of his pupil Alexander. This story was ostensibly intended to provide a moralizing or didactic message on the dangers of letting women have too much control.<sup>59</sup> From a patriarchal point of view, such a message would have been considered pertinent on an object made for a young wife: in Italy the story was also reproduced

on objects like birth trays and marriage *cassoni* ostensibly as a warning on how to behave.<sup>60</sup> However, we should not dismiss potential alternative readings of this story by the casket's female owner. Seen in conjunction with the tournament scene on the lid, the image of Aristotle provides another example of men "performing" for women, this time with less honor. Aristotle behaves foolishly for love, with a woman directing the proceedings from above—literally, on Aristotle's back. In an ironic twist, however, Alexander is shown in the "traditional" position of female tournament viewer, watching his teacher and mistress perform from the parapets.

Carns has suggested that the various stories represented on the Metropolitan casket "form part of a worldview of love in which every type of lover and every form of love is present."<sup>61</sup> This variety of different "loves" chimes with Burns's assertion that there is more than one version of courtly love, and more than one interpretation of the courtly lady found in chivalric literature.<sup>62</sup> Acknowledging the many different kinds of love, and of viewpoints, thus allows us to challenge the idea of a universal, "phallic" gaze which is the property of the masculine viewer and to which woman is subject, restricting her to what Mulvey called her "to-be-looked-at-ness."<sup>63</sup> Thus, although these carved ivory scenes may originally have had a didactic purpose, it is important to consider them from the point of view of the women for whom they were destined, who were probably very familiar both with the idea of watching knights perform for ladies and with the access that women could have to the chivalric body both within romance literature and at actual tournaments.

The scenes of jousting and Gawain on the Marvelous Bed evoked the relative instability of gender and viewing positions, depicting moments where a woman's gaze was active and the female spectator more than a reflection of masculine prowess. Such inversion was further reinforced by the topsy-turvy image of Aristotle being ridden by Phyllis, which itself stood for the wider *topos* of 'women on top', which was rife with ambivalent meanings. Moreover, if an ivory casket or mirror case were given in marriage or as a love token, a woman may have read the scenes

they depicted as an allusion to the real access to the male body that came of heterosexual love. The courtly scenes act as a prelude to the pleasures that would take place outside of the public arena, where the two lovers would be able to engage in a mutual, amorous gazing, without fear of the loss of their subjectivity.

*University of Liège*

#### END NOTES

1. This article comes out of my post-doctoral research project at the University of Liège, supported by an FNRS fellowship. Opportunities to refine the ideas discussed here came at the 2008 International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo and the 2008 International Medieval Congress at Leeds.
2. See for instance, Juliet Barker, *The Tournament in England, 1100-1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), esp. pp. 100-110; Juliet Barker and Richard Barber, *Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry and Pageantry in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989); Mary Arlene Santina, *The Tournament and Literature: Literary Representations of the Medieval Tournament in Old French Works, 1150-1226* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), esp. Chapter 7, "The Lady and the Tournament," pp. 91-108.
3. Louise Olga Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (London, Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991), pp. 210-211.
4. One exception to this is Phillippa Plock's recent article, "Watching Women Watching Warriors: Nicolas Poussin's *Tancred and Erminia* and the Visuality of Papal Court Tournaments," *Art History* 31 (2008): 139-158.
5. E. Jane Burns, "Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition," *Signs* 27 (2001): 23-57, p. 28. She is referring to Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley, "The Lady Vanishes: The Problem of Women's Absence in Late Medieval and Renaissance Texts," in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writing: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989), pp. 2-17.
6. Mulvey's essay was first published in *Screen* 16 (1975): 6-18 and was reprinted in her *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1989), pp. 14-26.
7. In the third of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, for example, the lover describes himself as being "bound" by his lover's eyes: see Petrarch, *Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Poems*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Oxford UP, 1985; repr. 1999). See also Robert Baldwin, "Gates Pure and Shining and Serene: Mutual Gazing as an Amatory Motif in Western Literature and Art," *Renaissance and Reform* 10 (1986): 23-48, p. 23; and Dana E. Stewart, *The Arrow of Love: Optics, Gender, and Subjectivity in Medieval Love Poetry* (Cranbury and London: Bucknell UP, 2003).

8. Kim M. Phillips, "Bodily Walls, Windows, and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth-Century English Books for Women," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 184-98, pp. 190-91.
9. *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, trans. William Caxton, ed. M. Y. Offord, EETS, ss 2 (London: Oxford UP, 1971).
10. Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop* 25 (1988): 4-30; Madeleine H. Caviness, "Patron or Matron? A Capetian Bride and a *Vade Mecum* for Her Marriage Bed," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 333-62; see also Paolo Berdini, "Women Under the Gaze: A Renaissance Genealogy," *Art History* 21 (1998): 565-590.
11. Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2001), p. 25 (my emphasis). Mulveian theory is also used extensively by Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn in their analysis of spectatorship and the 'performativity' of medieval illuminated manuscripts in *Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006).
12. Caviness, *Visualizing Women*, p. 34.
13. Burns, "Courtly Love," pp. 25-26. See also Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), who has considered how female readers responded to the representation and appropriation of their sex in Old French Literature, "reading the female subject both as a social construction and as the site of possible resistance" (p. 15).
14. On the various medieval theories of vision, see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996).
15. Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 58.
16. Baldwin, "Gates Pure and Shining," p. 23.
17. Baldwin, "Gates Pure and Shining," pp. 24-25, including quotation.
18. Regina Stefaniak, "Correggio's *Camera di San Paolo*: An Archaeology of the Gaze," *Art History* 16 (1993): 203-238, p. 204.
19. Adrian W. B. Randolph, "Gendering the Period Eye: *Deschi da Parto* and Renaissance Visual Culture," *Art History* 27 (2004): 538-62; and Geraldine A. Johnson, "Beautiful Brides and Model Mothers: The Devotional and Talismanic Functions of Early Modern Marian Reliefs," in *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation, and Marriage in Premodern Europe*, ed. Anne L. McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnación (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 135-61.
20. Elizabeth L'Estrange, *Holy Motherhood: Gender, Dynasty and Visual Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008), esp. pp. 28-38 (p. 37).
21. However, as Plock ("Watching Women Watching Warriors") has recently argued, at papal tournaments organised in Early Modern Rome, "cardinals



visually shared a point of view traditionally perceived to be occupied by women.” See esp. pp. 148–50.

22. Barker, *Tournament*, p. 84; Ruth Huff Cline, “The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 20 (1945): 204–11.

23. Barker, *Tournament*, p. 84.

24. See Barker, *Tournament*, pp. 84–94, 102; Eric Bousmar, “La Place des hommes et des femmes dans les fêtes de cour bourguignonnes (Philippe le Bon—Charles le Hardi),” in *A la cour de Bourgogne: le duc, son entourage, son train*, ed. Jean-Marie Cauchies (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 11–31.

25. See for instance, Ad Putter, “Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature,” in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York/London: Garland, 1997), pp. 279–302.

26. Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament*, p. 212.

27. Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

28. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, p. 67.

29. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, p. 71.

30. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, p. 74.

31. There is now a burgeoning range of literature on men and masculinity in the Middle Ages, as critics recognise that “gender studies” is not synonymous with “women’s studies.” See for example, Cohen and Wheeler, ed., *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*; *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and K. J. Lewis (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2004); and *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Claire A. Lees (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1994).

32. Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry*, trans. Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2005). De Charny’s book was written as a guide for members of the Company of the Star, created by the French king Jean II in 1352. On French and English women’s ownership and patronage of Arthurian literature, see Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 1–3; and Carol M. Meale, “...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englissh, and frensch’: Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England,” in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, ed. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 128–158 (esp. pp. 139–42); and Carol M. Meale, “Gode Men, Wiues, Maydnes and Alle Men’: Romance and its Audiences,” in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Meale (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 209–25, esp. pp. 222–23. Arthurian Romances were listed amongst the possessions of Isabella of France, wife of Edward II, on her death: see Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1982), p. 170.

33. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, p. 74.

34. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, p. 74.

35. Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff. 3.11.

36. Phillips, “Bodily Walls,” p. 187.

37. Quoted in Phillips, “Bodily Walls,” p. 192; see also *Merlin, or The Early History of King Arthur*, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley, EETS, os 10, 21, 36, 112



- (London: EETS, 1865, 1866, 1869, 1899). For this quotation, os 36, p. 499.
38. Phillips, "Bodily Walls," pp. 192-93. The other texts have also been published by EETS: *The Romance of Sir Degrevant*, ed. by L. F. Casson, EETS, os 221 (London: EETS, 1949); and *Generydes*, ed. by W. Aldis Wright, EETS, os 55 and 70 (London: Trübner, 1873-1878).
39. The standard reference work on so-called Gothic ivories remains R. Koechlin's, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, 3 vols (Paris, 1924-1926) although the work is of its time in terms of the items included and its approach to classification. A new project to undertake the cataloguing of ivories not discussed by Koechlin is being carried out by John Lowden at the Courtauld Institute, London. See also the exhibition catalogues *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. Peter Barnett, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997); R. Randall, *Masterpieces in Ivory from the Walters Art Gallery* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1985); and Margaret Gibson, *The Liverpool Ivories: Late Antique and Medieval Ivory and Bone Carving in the Liverpool Museum and the Walker Art Gallery* (London: HMSO, 1994).
40. Susan L. Smith, "The Gothic Mirror and the Female Gaze," in *Saints, Sinners and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 73-93, pp. 73-74; and Paula Mae Carns, "Compilatio in Ivory: The Composite Casket in the Metropolitan Museum," *Gesta* 44 (2005): 69-88, p. 69.
41. See Smith, "The Gothic Mirror," pp. 75-76.
42. Smith, "The Gothic Mirror," pp. 76 n. 19, 86, and figure 4.7.
43. Smith, "The Gothic Mirror," p. 76.
44. The oft-cited, satirical poem by Eustache Deschamps, *The Mirror of Marriage*, indicates the contempt in which women's possession (and flaunting) of material objects like mirrors could be held. See Smith, "The Gothic Mirror," p. 74.
45. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (17.190.173). The casket is one of the "coffrets composites" identified by Koechlin. It has been discussed most recently by Carns. The casket was also discussed by Thomas T. Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The Art Bulletin* 8 (1926): 127-139, although the images show a nineteenth-century front panel that has subsequently been replaced by the original, identified in 1988. See C. T. Little, *Recent Acquisitions* (Metropolitan Museum of Art) (New York, 1987), p. 16.
46. The scene below, of a couple being rowed around in a boat is, according to Carns, a nineteenth-century replacement. See "Compilatio," p. 82.
47. While the casket was in the collection of Lord Gort it was discussed by David J. A. Ross, "Allegory and Romance on a Mediaeval French Marriage Casket," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948): 112-142. The photographs from this article are now in the Warburg Photographic Collection.
48. London, British Library, Additional MS 42130, fol. 202v.
49. Carns, "Compilatio," p. 84.
50. The scenes on the casket are: on the front, the story of Aristotle and

Phyllis/Alexander, and Pyramus and Thisbe; on the left end Tristan and Isolde, and the Capture of the Unicorn; on the back, Gawain fighting a lion, Lancelot on the Sword Bridge, Gawain on the Bed of Marvels, and the Ladies of the Castle; and on the right end, a knight rescuing a woman from the clutches of a wild man, and Galahad receiving the key to the Castle of Maidens. On the identification of some of the more complex of these images and their sources, see Carns, "*Compilatio*."

51. Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, in *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D. D. R. Owen (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), p. 476.

52. Chrétien, *Perceval*, p. 476.

53. Chrétien, *Perceval*, p. 477.

54. Chrétien described the bed as standing "on little carved dogs [...] and the dogs on four castors that moved so freely and swiftly that [...] it would run all over the hall [...]." See *Perceval*, p. 475.

55. Carns, "*Compilatio*," p. 79.

56. Chrétien, *Perceval*, p. 479.

57. No. 1061 in Koechlin. See Ross, "Allegory and Romance," pl. 26c.

58. Chrétien, *Perceval*, p. 478.

59. See Susan J. Smith, *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995); Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," in her *Society and Culture in Early-Modern France*, (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 124-15; and Yvonne Bleiyerveld, "Powerful Men, Foolish Women: The Popularity of the 'Power of Women' Topos in Art," in *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York-Margaret of Austria*, ed. Dagmar Eichberger (Leuven: Brepols, 2005), pp. 167-75.

60. See Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1999), esp. pp. 66-70.

61. Carns, "*Compilatio*," p. 84.

62. Burns, "Courtly Love," pp. 27-28

63. See also Berdini, "Women under the Gaze," p. 573ff.



Fig. 1: Jousting Scene, Ivory Mirror Case, French (Paris), 1330-50, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. The Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund. Photo: Katherine Wetzel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



Fig. 2: Barthélemy d'Eyck, Women Inspecting the Combatants, *Le Livre des Tournois de René d'Anjou*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fonds français 2695, fols. 67v-68r, c. 1460 © BnF

Fig. 3: Couple Riding to Hunt, Ivory Mirror Case, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, museum no. 222-1867, fourteenth century. Published by kind permission of the Board of Trustees of the V&A (© V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum)







Fig. 4: Siege of the Castle of Love and Tournament, Ivory Casket, New York, Metropolitan Museum, museum no. 17.190.173, fourteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (© The Metropolitan Musieum of Art)



Fig. 5: Aristotle and Phyllis/Alexander, Ivory Casket, New York, Metropolitan Museum, museum no. 17.190.173, fourteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (© The Metropolitan Musieum of Art)



Fig. 6: Jousting Scene with Arming of the Knights, Ivory Casket, formerly Lord Gort Collection, fourteenth century. Photo: Warburg Institute

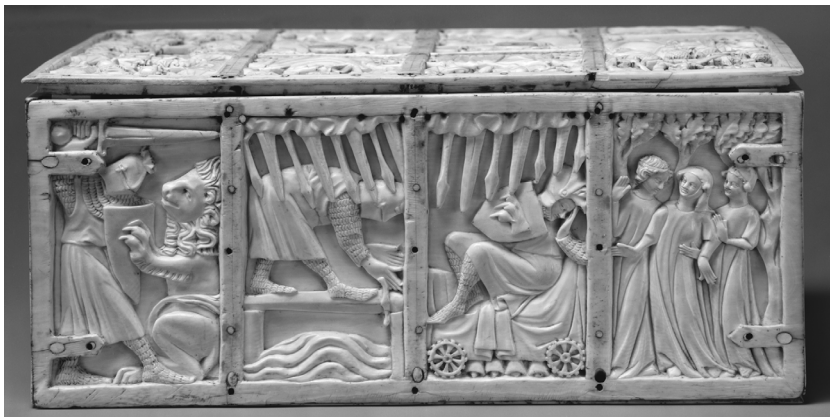


Fig. 7: Gawain on the Bed of Marvels, Ivory Casket, New York, Metropolitan Museum, museum no. 17.190.173, fourteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, 17 (© The Metropolitan Musieum of Art)



Fig. 8: Gawain on the Bed of Marvels, Ivory Mirror Case, Bologna, Museo Civico, fourteenth century (© photo: Mario Berardi).